

ON THE FOLK CUSTOMS OF HUAZHAO FESTIVAL WHICH IS A KIND OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ITS MODERN VALUE¹

Ma Zhihui

International Urbanology Research Center
Hangzhou, China

Keywords: Huazhao Festival, folk customs, modern value

Huazhao Festival is a traditional one that is celebrated in early spring and appeals to both highbrows and lowbrows. Once, it was as significant as Lantern Festival and Mid-autumn Festival. Huazhao Festival persists in certain places (for example, Xinzhou District of Wuhan), but it is not celebrated like a traditional festival; instead, it has evolved into a fair. Despite its fading away from people's life due to changes in modern society, its cultural glamour still exists as an important part of traditional national culture; activities such as spring outing, enjoying and planting flowers and picking wild vegetables are still performed nowadays, which are still the mental nourishment and tradition for those with refined tastes and common people; this festival embody the features of traditional flower and farming culture of Chinese nation. In recent years, along with the economic and social development, the improvement of people's living standards and the increase of people's spiritual and cultural demands, Huazhao Festival, as a traditional festival attaching great importance to "elegance", has regained people's attention. Huazhao Festival celebrated in Laojie Village, Xianguanzhuang Town, Yuanling County, Hunan Province has been included in the "Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Huaihua City". In 2008, Huangpu District of Guangzhou restored Huazhao Festival which had not been celebrated in the past century. Sanshui District of Foshan re-established Huazhao Festival that disappeared about one hundred years ago in 2010. On April 9th, 2011, Hangzhou resumed Huazhao Festival and celebrated it in Xixi Wetland where the Festival was hosted grandly in Ming and Qing Dynasty. On that day, a series of activities combining traditional customs and modern ways of leisure were carried out including arranging float parades, enjoying flowers in Xixi, putting on performance of action art concerning Huazhao, hosting Xixi flower festival, enjoying plum blossom along a winding river, organizing Xixi temple fair, making home beautification, holding flower banquets and Huazhao food festival, making matches with the help of flowers, finding love in Xixi, etc. During this festival, Xixi National Wetland Park received 1.046 million person-time tourists, an increase of 34.53% compared with the number in the same period of the previous year. Thereinto, Green Bank as the main site received 190,800 person-time, a rise of 20 times compared with that in the same period of the previous year. The operating revenue of Xixi Wetland Park during this festival amounted to 26.36 million yuan, an increase of 38.66% compared with the same period of the previous year. These figures illustrated the charm and economic and cultural value of Huazhao Festival. Owing to the efforts of relevant people including literature and his-

¹ This paper is the result achieved in one stage of a subject in the domain of philosophy and social sciences of Zhejiang Province, namely, Research on HUL Approach Applied in the Conservation and Management of Historic Cities and Towns in the Process of New Urbanization (14NDJC22YBM)

tory experts, Huazhao Festival has been included the “Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Zhejiang Province”. However, the value and significance of Huazhao Festival is not confined to Hangzhou and other regions that have resumed this festival; it is universal across the country. Thus, combing the traditional custom of Huazhao Festival and analyzing its modern value are significant for conserving and inheriting this national festival, promoting its restoration in more areas in ways more approximate to historical tradition and giving play to its unique function to benefit modern society.

1. The origin of Huazhao Festival

Because of the lack of historical data, the origin of Huazhao Festival has been controversial. Basically, its origin is relevant to Chinese people’s traditional worship for nature and love for flowers. China is the hometown of flowers which has special qualities in traditional Chinese culture; the compliment and chanting of literati in past dynasties endowed flowers with profound personality spirit. The worship for flower goddess represented the personification of plants and nature. Tang Dynasty was an essential period in flower history of China, when refined scholars and literati’s fondness and appreciation of flowers was unprecedented. In late Tang Dynasty, Luo Qiu wrote a book entitled *Hua Jiu Ci*. In this book, he expressed his view that flowers should be endowed with “nine bestowments” and his worship for flowers, “the 1st bestowment was a curtain (to prevent against wind). The 2nd was a pair of gold scissors (to cut the broken branches). The 3rd was a spring (to wash flowers). The 4th was a jade jar (to store flowers). The 5th was a pedestal with glyphs (to put flowers on it). The 6th was drawing pictures for flowers. The 7th was composing songs for flowers. The 8th was good wine (which could be drunk while enjoying flowers). The 9th was writing poems for flowers.”² People’s affection for flowers in that era can be seen from this. In late Tang Dynasty, *Bo Yi Zhi*, a book about strange things recorded the story that Cui Xuanwei came across the flower goddesses in the east part of Luoyuan and promised to protect them from the harm of wind god by erecting flags,³ which is the origin of people’s activity of protecting flowers

2 Luo Qiu (Tang Dynasty): *Hua Jiu Ci*, included in volume I set 4 of *Xiang Yan Cong Shu*, a book compiled by Chong Tianzi. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 1992, P963.

3 Zheng Huang (Tang Dynasty): *Bo Yi Zhi*- Cui Xuanwei, included in *Cong Shu Ji Cheng Chu Bian*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985. Zeng Zaoji (Song Dynasty) also recorded this story in volume 24 of *Lei Shuo* and the title he used was *Bo Yi Zhi-Zhong Hua Zhi Jing*, but his version was a simplified one. The story was recorded in this way: “On a moonlit night, Cui Xuanwei met a young woman dressed in light green clothes, who had several female companions, namely, Yang, Li, Tao and a girl in red named Cucu. The message came that aunt Feng was coming. She spoke coldly but behaved in a graceful and dignified way. All those women were extremely beautiful and giving out pleasant fragrance. Cucu said, “we live in this courtyard. We need aunt Feng’s protection to avoid being hurt by strong winds. You can help us by setting up in the yard a red streamer with the image of the sun, the moon and five stars (Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars and Saturn) on it in the morning of the first day of every year. The first day of this year has passed and you can do this on the 21st day of this month. Cui agreed. On that day he set up a streamer as he had promised. The east wind blew strongly. A lot of trees were broken and sand was flying everywhere. However, the flowers within the yard remained peaceful. Xuanwei realized that those young women he met were flower goddesses. Cucu was the goddess of pomegranate and aunt Feng was the goddess of wind. Afterwards, Yang and her companions came again to express their gratitude, each carrying some baskets of peach and plum blossom. They said, “you can become immortal if you eat this and we can also live forever. Xuanwei was still alive till the beginning year of Yuanhe period. He looked as young as a man in his thirties.” Extracted from *Zi*

performed at Huazhao Festival in later ages. The story was recorded as follows:

In the period of Tianbao, Chushi (a person who was talented but reclusive) Cui Xuanwei had a house to the east of Luoyuan (the imperial hunting ground in Luoyang). He was obsessed to immortality preached by Taoism; therefore, he kept eating medicine for thirty years. Because he was running out of his medicine, he led his servants to Songshan Mountain to gather herbs. When he returned to his house, no one was there and wild grass was growing everywhere in the courtyard. On one spring night, the moon shone brightly and the wind was light. Cui was alone in the yard and didn't feel sleepy. His servants were not allowed to interrupt him without any excuse. After eleven o'clock, a young woman dressed in light green suddenly appeared; she said, "my home is at Wan; I want to go to Shangdong Gate with several female companions and we hope to stay overnight at your place, would you allow us to do that?" Xuanwei permitted. Soon, about a dozen young women followed her there. A woman dressed in green introduced herself, "my family name is Yang." Then she pointed at two other women successively, introducing their family name, Li and Tao. Next, she pointed her finger at a girl wearing red clothes, claiming "her family name is Shi, and her given name is Cucu." All these young women had their own maid. Cui Xuanwei greeted them one by one and invited them to sit in the moonlight, asking why they were heading for Shangdong Gate. They replied, "we are going to visit aunt Feng. She said she would come to see but she has not come. As a result, we would like to visit her." Before they were seated, a maid reported outside that aunt Feng was coming; they were all surprised and went out to welcome her. Yang said, "the owner of this house is very virtuous; he behaves properly, so this place is better than others." Xuanwei met Ms Feng who spoke coldly but behaved in a graceful and dignified way. He bowed to them and invited them to have a seat. He discovered all women there were of remarkable beauty; besides, they were all sending out pleasant fragrance. Cui Xuanwei demanded his servants to serve wine; these young women sang a song one after another before drinking. Xuanwei remembered two of these songs. The woman in red drank a toast to the one in white, "You are as white as snow; in the moonlight, your young face looks more beautiful. You dare not complain the east wind; instead, you can only sigh for the quick passage of time and fast fading of your beauty." Then, the one in white also drank a toast to the red in return, singing "dressed in red, you are smiling; the thin rouge on your face makes your looks more charming. You resent that your youth passes quickly; do not bear a grudge against the ruthless east wind that deprives you of your beauty." When it was the turn of aunt Feng to propose a toast, she behaved frivolously and knocked over her wine cup; consequently, the wine spilled onto and stained Cucu's clothes. Angrily, Cucu said, "all the others are trying to please and flatter you, but I will never do that." Having said that, she stood up and left. Aunt Feng said, "this girl lost her temper while drinking wine." All people stood up and went outdoors with aunt Feng who was going to the south. These young ladies said goodbye to her in the courtyard. Having experienced the event, Xuanwei did not feel surprised at all. They came again on the following night and said that they were going to visit aunt Feng. Cucu said with anger, "it is not necessary for us to visit Feng! We can request Mr. Cui to protect us? Do you think it feasible?" she said to Cui, "my companions and I are living inside the courtyard; we get hurt every year by fierce winds and cannot live a happy and peace-

Bu-Zai Jia Lei which is Book 62 of *Beijing Tu Shu Guan Gu Ji Zhen Ben Cong Kan*. Beijing: Contents and Literature Publishing House, 1988, P412.

ful life. In consequence, we have to beg aunt Feng to defend us. I offended aunt Feng yesterday and she may not protect us anymore. If you can do that for us, we will reward you." Xuanwei asked, "what can I do to safeguard you?" Cucu replied, "if you can make a red flag with the drawing of the sun, the moon, and five stars (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) on the first day of the lunar year and then set the flag in the east part of the court, we can be kept away from injuries. The first day of this year had already passed, so please set the flag on the morning of the 21st of this month, when the wind blows gently; in this way, you can protect us." Cui Xuanwei agreed. These little women said to him together, "we will never forget your kindness." After saying that, they bowed to him and left. Cui Xuanwei saw then off. They crossed the wall of the court and disappeared shortly after they entered the courtyard. Cui did what he was told to: set a flag on that day. On that very day, the east wind blew strongly; many trees were broken and sand was flying in the air; however, the flowers in the courtyard were not harmed by the wind. Xuanwei realized that those young women got their family name, Yang, Li and Tao in accordance with the color of their clothes; actually, they were all flower goddesses. The girl in red with the name of Cucu was pomegranate goddess and aunt Feng was the god of wind. Several days later, Yang and her female companions came again at night to express their gratitude to Cui Xuanwei. Each of them brought several baskets of peach and plum flowers with them and advised Cui to eat the flowers, "Your life expectancy can be prolonged if you eat them. We hope you can live here forever and protect us, so that we can also be immortal." Cui Xuanwei was still alive till the beginning of Yuanhe period. He looked as young as a man in his thirties. He told the story to people living in that era, but they would not believe him.

The two historical materials mentioned previously demonstrate that in late Tang Dynasty, people's appreciation and protection of flowers, and worship for flower goddess increased. In later generations, the view that Huazhao Festival originated from Tang Dynasty⁴ should be modified; specifically, it should be said to originate from late Tang Dynasty. Its earliest celebration was carried out at some time after the 1st of the second lunar month was specified as Zhonghe Festival, during the fifth year (789 A.D.) of Zhenyuan period of Emperor Dezong of Tang when the festival previously celebrated on the last day of the first month was abolished. The reason for this is many customs of Huazhao Festival (see the following for details) were activities absorbed from Zhonghe Festival, such as promoting agriculture, offering sacrifices to god to pray for a good harvest, picking wild vegetables, etc. According to *Guang Shan Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Guangshan County) which was written during the reign of Emperor Guangxu, the 2nd of the second lunar month was commonly regarded as "informal Huazhao Festival" and the 15th of the month as "formal Huazhao Festival".

2. Folk customs of Huazhao Festival

Currently, places that have restored Huazhao Festival ought to lay emphasis on exploring relevant customs; in this way, they can truly inherit this festival, integrate mod-

4 *Renhe Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Renhe County)(compiled in the reign of Emperor Kangxi) Volume 5 "customs": "People in Tang Dynasty celebrated Huazhao Festival on the 15th day of the second lunar month." This book was the block-printed edition printed in the 26th year of Kangxi Period (1687). A book that was the block-printed edition printed in the Hall of Wu Ying Dian in the 49th year of Kangxi Period (1710), *Yuan Jian Lei Han · Sui Shi Bu Qi · Huazhao* quoted from *Ti Yao Lu*: "Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 15th day of the second lunar month in Tang Dynasty."

ern elements into it and provide it with enough vigor to develop sustainably. Nevertheless, judging from the real celebration of this festival, it can be detected that the festival is celebrated in intense commercial atmosphere, while traditional customs are absent. For instance, Huazhao Festival celebrated at Old Street of Xinzhou District of Wuhan has a history of more than 800 years; it has been included in the list of intangible cultural heritage of Hubei Province. The activity of offering sacrifice to flower goddess has gradually evolved into an agricultural trade fair; “programs of folk customs are absent” and “few tourists come”.⁵ In 2008, Huangpu District of Guangzhou restored Huazhao Festival that had been suspended for a decade; the theme of the activities performed on that day was “romantic relationship”.⁶ The core characteristics of Huazhao Festival, including elegance, relaxation, emphasis on agriculture, etc were not displayed. Thus, it is necessary to review the customs of Huazhao Festival in history, in order to provide reference for the restoration of this festival.

3. Having spring outings and catching butterflies

Entertainment was an essential function of Huazhao Festival; one of the special activities was having spring outings to enjoy flowers. According to the record of “the fifteenth day of the second lunar month in Volume 1 of *Meng Liang Lu*, at Huazhao Festival, people in the capital all went to gardens to enjoy rare flowers and trees; those popular gardens contained the ones outside Qiantang Gate, such as Yuhu, Guliulin, Yangfu, Yundong, the ones outside Qianhu Gate, such as Qingle, Xiaohu and the ones on Baojiashan Hill outside Jiahui Gate, such as Wang Baosheng’s and Zhang Taiwei’s garden. The most fascinating scenery was the peach blossom on Baojiashan Hill, which seemed like a barrier made of brocade and was extremely beautiful.” Xiao Lizhi, a person living in Song Dynasty once wrote, “at Huazhao Festival, I climbed Sushan Mountain with Mr. Liu who took part in the imperial examination in the same year with me and who was appointed as a court clerk, we felt sleepy and had a sleep in a Buddhist temple”.⁷ Lv Yanzhen who lived in Yuan Dynasty wrote such a poem, “Not being afraid of cold spring breeze, alone I walked on the flat bank on Huazhao Festival. Rosy clouds scattered on the sky; the water in the brook became very clear, thanks to the drizzle. The trees surrounding steps were blossoming; birds were singing happily in the wood.”⁸ Chen Bangzhan, a person in Ming Dynasty, wrote in his poem, “Luxuriant carts drawn by robust horses came in a stream. People inside these carriages intended to see flowers. I’m too old to do that, so on Huazhao Festival I chose to stay at home.”⁹ All these poems indicated that spring outings on Huazhao Festival

5 Huazhao Festival celebrated in the recent ten years was very popular but lacked folk customs, an article on Chutian Metropolis Daily issued on March 8th, 2012.

6 People in Love worshiped for a happy marriage in rain on Huazhao Festival, an article on Southern Metropolis Daily issued on March 19th 2011.

7 Xiao Lizhi (Song Dynasty), the first half of *Xiao Bingya Shi Ji Shi Yi* (a supplementation of Xiao Bingya’s collection of poems) “old style poems with 7 Chinese characters in each line”. The block-printed edition printed by Xiao Min during the period of Hongzhi in Ming Dynasty.

8 Lv Yanzhen (Yuan Dynasty), *Cang Lang Xuan Shi Ji* (a collection of poems), volume 5 “events in the year of Bingchen and Dingsi”. Hand-copied book in Qing Dynasty.

9 Chen Bangzhan (Ming Dynasty), *He Hua Shan Fang Shi Gao* (a collection of poems) volume 22. The block-printed edition printed by Niu Weichi in the 46th year of Wanli era in Ming Dynasty.

were quite popular in different times. On the 15th day of the second lunar month in Cixi region, “people had spring outings and played music with a variety of musical instruments”, “there were also other activities, including making flower baskets, dancing with a bamboo pole in hand, swinging, playing Cuju, and so on.”¹⁰ On Huazhao Festival in Shaoxing region, “the west garden was open to public; all people in this prefecture visited this garden, which was called open the month of the dragon (here the dragon referred to Wolongshan Mountain)”; in addition, officials led guests to watch boat races; children sang ballads about green plum and the tune sounded pretty mild and pleasant. The ballads they sang were similar to the one named Baxia Zhu Zhi (the bamboo poles in Baxia area).¹¹ People were very boisterous on that day. *Renhe Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Renhe County) (compiled in Kangxi period) recorded in volume 5 the topic of which was “customs”: “plum trees in Xixi Hangzhou blossomed in profusion and the fragrance of these blooms could be smelt even in places 10 Li away from there.”, “talented people who had no desire for fame and wealth preferred to live a reclusive life in that place; sometimes they travelled on a small boat, carrying food and wine and bed clothes with them and would not return until ten days or so passed”. Kong Shangren once wrote a poem entitled Zhu Zhi Ci to describe the spectacular occasion of people’s coming back after having spring outings on Huazhao Festival, “the homeland of hermits became that of drunk ones; the sun was about to set and its slanting light was nearly blocked by the city’s gate. People riding on horses equipped with a saddle of carved patterns and a bridle with embroidered designs vied with one another to enter the gate earlier; even the dirt they raised smelt fragrant.”

In ancient times, females’ outdoor activities were strictly restricted, but Huazhao Festival provided convenience for them to have outings. A line in Fang Hui’s poem Two Relatives of Mine Living in Wujiang came, taking along wine on the night of the 25th day, “many girls went to the suburb to enjoy themselves and the weather was good, when they returned at dusk, some drunken ones were seen on the bank of the brook”.¹² This revealed that quite a lot of women had an outing on Huazhao Festival. It was the same case in Jiaxing region where “women went out to have spring an outing”.¹³ Hence, Huazhao Festival was popular with women and could be considered as a “females’ festival” in ancient China.¹⁴

The prevalent activity of catching butterflies at Huazhao Festival “was an interesting folk amusement activity”.¹⁵ According to *Cheng Zhai Shi Hua*, “Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 12th day of the second lunar month in the capital of Song Dynasty, Kaifeng; people caught butterflies on that day.”¹⁶ He Qiaoyuan who lived in Ming

10 *Cixi Xian Zhi*(the annuals of Cixi County) (written in Tianqi Period) volume 12 “Cixi Xian Jiu Jing” (old looks of Cixi County). A version published in the 4th year of Tianqi period.

11 *Kuaiji Xian Zhi*(the annuals of Kuaiji County) (written in Kangxi period) volume 7 “records of customs”. The stereotype edition proofread by the History Recording committee of Shaoxing County, which was printed in the 25th year of The Republic of China.

12 Fang Hui (in Yuan Dynasty): *Tong Jiang Xu Ji*, volume 6. Included in *Si Ku Quan Shu* that was compiled in Wen Yuan Ge (the imperial library of Qing Dynasty).

13 *Jiaying Xian Zhi*(the annuals of Jiaying County) (written in Guangxu era) volume 16 “customs”. The block-printed edition printed in the 34th year of Guangxu Emperor’s reign.

14 Chang Jianhua: *Married and Unmarried Women in Ancient China*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006, P162.

15 Gao Tianxing: *The Festival and Custom Culture in China*, Zhengzhou:Zhongyuan Nongmin Press, 2008, P91.

16 Wang Hao (in Qing Dynasty): *Guang Qun Fang Pu*, section 2 of the part of Tianshi

Dynasty quoted from *Zhangzhou Zhi* (the annuals of Zhangzhou) (compiled in Wanli period) in *Min Shu*, “the 15th day of the second lunar month was Huazhao Festival... in Shaowu, girls whose age was above 15 caught butterflies on this day.” Gong Baiyao wrote in his poem Missing Old Friends at Taoyuan · Spring Melancholy, “On Huazhao Festival in whose garden was the butterfly-catching game hosted? Petals of flowers were falling quietly down to the ground.” In Suzhou area, at the birthday of flowers, “girls played butterfly-catching games”.¹⁷

4. Planting flowers and vegetables and picking wild vegetables

At Huazhao Festival, various places had the custom of planting flowers and vegetables. It was believed that flowers and vegetables planted on that day could survive easily. In Shaoxing, at this festival, “intellectuals all bought flowers and trees and growing them in their garden.”¹⁸ People in Wukang County “sowed the seeds of melons and eggplants” on 12th day of the second lunar month which was Huazhao Festival.¹⁹ In Yuqian County, Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 15th day of the second lunar month and people sowed the seeds of melons and eggplants and planted mulberries and calcutta hems.²⁰

Around Huazhao Festival, *Artemisia stelleriana* and shepherd's purse are quite fresh and nutritious; for common people in ancient times who suffered from insufficiency of food, wild vegetables were significant supplementation. Meanwhile, wild vegetables in early spring also have the function of promoting health and warding off illness; that was why they were popular with people. The custom of “picking wild vegetables” originated from the tradition of “collecting vegetables at Qujiang” in Tang Dynasty.²¹ “Since Li Qin in Tang Dynasty proposed the abrogation of the celebration of the 15th day of the first lunar month and suggested making the 1st day of the second lunar month Zhonghe Festival, the custom of picking wild vegetables appeared”.²² *Han Mo Ji* recorded, “according to Luoyang's custom, Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 2nd day of the second lunar month. Aristocrats and civilians had an outing on that day which was also called wild vegetable picking day.” At Ming and Qing Dynasty, “the folks only cut some crowndaisy and mixed it with rice flour to make fried pancakes or fried some remaining rice cakes to eat on that day”.²³

17 Yuan Xuelan (in Qing Dynasty): *Wu Jun Sui Hua Ji Li*, volume 2 “Bai Hua Sheng Ri” (the birthday of flowers)

18 *Kuaiji Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Kuaiji County) (written in Kangxi era), volume 7 “the part of customs”. The stereotype edition proofread by the History Recording committee of Shaoxing County, which was printed in the 25th year of The Republic of China.

19 *Wukang Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Wukang County)(compiled in Daoguang period). The edition printed in the 9th year of Daoguang period in Qing Dynasty.

20 *Yuqian Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Yuqian County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 9 “record of customs”. The lithographic-printed edition printed in the 2nd year of The Republic of China.

21 Li Nao (in Tang Dynasty) recorded in *Qin Zhong Sui Shi Ji*: “on the 2nd day of the second month, people picked wild vegetables in Qujiang; going outings was popular among people.”

22 *Renhe Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Renhe County) (written in Kangxi period), volume 5 “customs”.

23 *Renhe Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Renhe County) (written in Kangxi period), volume 5 “customs”.

5. Praying to god and holding rallies

In ancient China, Nvyi, Kasyapa, Mrs. Wei and Mrs. Wei's disciple Huagu were all considered as flower goddess. Among them, Nvyi was the earliest one. In accordance with Tian Wen Xun, an article in the book *Huai Nan Zi*, "Nvyi beat the drum and sang songs to make the universe harmonious and to prompt the growth of grains, fowls and birds and plants." Later, people conceived a flower goddess for each month by choosing the major flower of that month and matched the goddess with renowned historical figures; in this way, 12 flower goddesses were confirmed, whose sculptures were put on the two sides of the chief flower goddess. Huang Zhouxing, a person living at the turn of Ming and Qing Dynasty, depicted a drawing of a shrine for flower goddesses in Record of Jiangjiu Garden: Ten Wonderful Pieces of Scenery, "Inside the pavilion, there were wood sculptures of flower goddesses which were enshrined; the sculptures of East Emperor and aunt Feng were also there. Drawings of gifted scholars and beauties were placed on two sides, for instance, Sima Changqing, Zhuo Wenjun, Qin Jia, Xu Shu, etc. On the birthday of flowers, that is, on Huazhao Festival, some beautiful girls would be required to put fruits and sweet wine in front of the sculptures as sacrifices; besides, they may recite new poems to persuade the goddesses to take these sacrifices." Offering sacrifices to flower goddesses was a great event for people in many places, especially for flower growers who "offered sacrifices to flower goddesses to beg for their protection".²⁴ Volume 2 of *Qing Jia Lu* written by Gu Lu recorded, "the 12th day was the birthday of flowers... people dedicated sacrifices and music to the shrine of flower goddesses in Huqiu to celebrate their birthday and this day was called 'Huazhao'."²⁵ In accordance with *Yaotai Pian Yu Jia Zhong Bu Lu*, the 12th day of second month of spring was customarily regarded as the 'birthday of flowers'; by making investigation into historical materials, the author found this day was also called 'bai hua zhao'. In spring of the year of Jia Yin, I read books on the bank of a lakelet. On that day, I called on teenagers of the village to hold a ceremony to celebrate the birthday of flowers and also offered sacrifices to the god of wind and the god of rain, wishing they would safeguard flowers."

At Huazhao Festival, temples and Taoist abbeys in some places also hosted a grand gathering; sacrifices were offered to the god of land by villagers. In accordance with the record of the 15th day of the second lunar month in volume 1 of *Meng Liang Lu*, at Huazhao Festival, Tian Qing Guan in Lin'an held a ceremony to celebrate the birthday of Laozi every year. Taoist there priests would light numerous colorfully decorated lanterns and ate vegetarian food, in order to pray for people." Countless noble people and civilians burnt incense in temples and Taoist abbeys to express their worship. In particular, "the monks and nuns of Chang Ming Temple which was outside Chongxin Gate and other temples hosted a rally to commemorate the Nirvana of Buddha. Flags and streamers were set up in a proper order; various rare flowers and fruits were offered to Buddha. Calligraphy and paintings of well-known talented people were hung up. Precious and scarce objects were also presented there. The scene was very solemn and audience came incessantly in the whole day".²⁶ Li E who lived in Qing Dynasty commented, "this was a custom of

24 Gao Tianxing: *The Festival and Custom Culture in China*, Zhongyuan Nongmin Press, 2008, P. 88.

25 This can also be found in volume 2 of *Wu Jun Sui Hua Ji Li* written by Yuan Xuelan; this volume was about "the birthday of flowers".

26 Meng Liang Lu, volume 1, the record of the 15th day of the second month.

Song Dynasty that remained after the royal court migrated to the south.”²⁷ Tian Rucheng wrote in *Xi Chao Le Shi* (happy events in the reign of Kangxi Emperor), “in Song Dynasty, there was a custom of catching butterflies. Although it is not performed anymore, however, the commemoration of Nirvana of Buddha, the discussion of the Maha-mayurividyarajni and the incense-burning made by Buddhist pilgrims are all remained customs of Song Dynasty.” Certain places celebrated Huazhao Festival by integrating customs of Zhonghe Festival and made offerings to God of Land on that day. *Chun'an Xian Zhi* (annuals of Chun'an County) recorded, “Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 2nd day of the second lunar month... the folks offered sacrifice to the god of land on this day.

6. Predicating the year's harvest

In ancient times, peasants generally believed that the weather condition on Huazhao Festival was closely related to the year's harvest; they predicted the year's harvest in light of the sunny or rainy condition of the day. “That day was in the spring equinox season when buds of colorful and fragrant flowers would be seen. Plants would get more nourishment from nature from that day onwards. Consequently, people forecasted the ripeness of fruits according to the weather on that day.”²⁸ “The harvest of the year depends on the weather condition on the 12th day of the second lunar month” and “if lightening occurs on this day, the harvest will be bad this year”.²⁹ These proverbs revealed the importance of the weather condition on Huazhao Festival. The part of “the second lunar month divination in divination category” in Volume 8 of *Bian Min Tu Zhuan* recorded, “the 12th day of this month is Huazhao Festival; if it is sunny on this day, all kinds of plants will have good fruits; a clear night is especially significant. If it rains on this day, it will be rainy for 40 continuous nights and cloudiness will last a long time. As a proverb goes, “if the weather is fine throughout the night of the 12th day, it will not be dreadful, even though it rains at night later.” According to *Zhi Fu Qi Shu* (a guiding book for acquiring wealth), the 12th day is Huazhao Festival and it is vital to have a fine weather on the night of this day. That is probably because plants will suffer if it rains at night during the second lunar month. If the weather is clear on that night, the future rainfalls will do little harm... A poem reads: if it is sunny on the 2nd day, peasants will start spring ploughing happily; the prospect of harvest can be judged in accordance with the weather conditions of the 7th and 8th day. If the night of Huazhao Festival is clear, worrying about the successive night rains is not necessary.”³⁰ As was said in *Hua Jing*, at Huazhao Festival, “a fine weather indicates flowers will blossom normally; if it is rainy of windy on this day, it can be predicted that this year's harvest will be poor; if the moonlight was dim, it implies disasters will happen”.³¹ In Suzhou, “people forecast the harvest of grains and fruits on the basis of the weather conditions of this day”.³² In Jiaxing, folks also “divine the year's

27 Li E: *Dongcheng Za Ji* (miscellany of Dongcheng), the first half.

28 Yuan Xuelan (in Qing Dynasty): *Wu Jun Sui Hua Ji Li*, volume 2 “Bai Hua Sheng Ri” (the birthday of flowers).

29 *Jiaxing Fu Zhi* (the annuals of Jiaxing state) (written in Guangxu era), volume 34 “customs”. The edition printed in the 5th year of Guangxu period in Qing Dynasty.

30 Chen Jiru (in Ming Dynasty): *Zhi Fu Qi Shu* (a book informing people of ways of getting wealth), volume 3 “the part of climate divination·divination of the second month”. The block-printed edition printed in Qianlong period in Qing Dynasty.

31 Chen Haozi (in Qing Dynasty): *Hua Jing*, volume 1 “Hua·Xin Cai”.

32 Yuan Xuelan (in Qing Dynasty): *Wu Jun Sui Hua Ji Li*, volume 2 “Bai Hua Sheng Ri” (the birthday of flowers).

harvest by considering the weather of this day".³³ "Rain was regarded to be ominous" on that day.³⁴ A line in *Hu Lu* read, "the 12th day was Huazhao Festival; if it is sunny on this day, the harvest of the year will be good. A saying was prevalent among peasants, 'whether they can gain benefit from their cultivation depends on the weather conditions of the 12th day of three months.' Here, the three months refers to the first three months of a year."³⁵ *Ming Shi Zong* (a collection of poems written by people of Ming Dynasty) recorded, "if it is sunny at Huazhao Festival, more grains and fruits can be expected."³⁶

At Huazhao Festival, the custom of drying seeds in the sun and praying for a harvest was also conducted in a lot of places. If the weather was clear on that day, peasants would collect and dry seeds of various plants to pray for a good harvest.

7. Inserting flowers in hair and fastening red cloth to stems of flowers and trees

Inserting flowers in hair was an approach adopted by women to add to their beauty; this custom prevailed in the royal court of Tang Dynasty when peonies were employed as the major material. Afterwards, the folks used common flowers or pieces of colorful cloth to correspond with the atmosphere of Huazhao Festival. Ma Zhongxi who lived in Ming Dynasty wrote in *Xuan Fu Zhi*, "at Huazhao Festival, women in cities cut colorful cloth to make flowers and plugged such flowers in hair, in order to conform to the festival." People in Fuyang County wore crowndaisy at Huazhao Festival, wishing for the permanence of youth. *Wucheng Xian Zhi* (Annals of Wucheng County) (written in the reign of Emperor Chongzhen) recorded, "at Huazhao Festival which was celebrated on the 2nd day of the second lunar month, young women picked and inserted leaves of crowndaisy in hair. The saying goes, 'wearing a leaf of crowndaisy on Huazhao Festival will make a woman young forever.'"³⁷

After the prevalence of the tale of Cui Xuanwei's protection of flowers by fastening pieces of colorful cloth to their stems, which was included in *Bo Yi Zhi*, the folks "imitated Cui Xuanwei's defending flowers from the harm of aunt Feng, cut colorful cloth into pieces and tied them to the stems of flowers as streamers; this activity is called 'Shang Hong'".³⁸ People would "fasten a piece of red cloth to the stems of flowers; if the stem of certain flowers were too thin to stand a piece of red cloth, people would plug a thin

33 *Jiaxing Xian Zhi* (the annals of Jiaxing County) (compiled in Chongzhen era), volume 15 "records of political events-folk customs". The block-printed edition printed in the 10th year of Chongzhen period in Ming Dynasty.

34 *Tongxiang Xian Zhi* (the annals of Tongxiang County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 2 "Yu Jiang Zhi Xia-Feng Su" (the second section of records about the territory-customs). The edition printed in the 13th year of Guangxu era in Qing Dynasty.

35 *Gui'an Xian Zhi* (the annals of Gui'an County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 12 "Yu Di Lue" (a brief record of geography). The edition printed in the 8th year of Guangxu period in Qing Dynasty.

36 *Ninghai Xian Zhi* (the annals of Ninghai County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 23 "Za Ji" (miscellany). The edition printed in the 28th year of Guangxu period in Qing Dynasty.

37 *Wucheng Xian Zhi* (the annals of Wucheng County) (compiled in Chongzhen era), volume 4 "Shi Xu" (seasons). The block-printed edition printed in the 10th year of Chongzhen period in Ming Dynasty.

38 Yuan Xuelan (in Qing Dynasty): *Wu Jun Sui Hua Ji Li*, volume 2 "Bai Hua Sheng Ri" (the birthday of flowers).

bamboo stick in the flower pot and tie a piece of red cloth to the stick”.³⁹ Cai Yun wrote a poem Wu Yu, “The birthday of flowers is good; the flowering stage has not come but half of spring has passed. Colorful flowers seem like splendid brocade; to celebrate the birthday of flower goddess, the flowers decorated the environment.” Zhang Chunhua complimented the beautiful scene of Huazhao Festival in his poem Hu Cheng Sui Shi Qu Ge, “Huazhao Festival comes and flowers blossom; pieces of red cloth attached to stems of flowers and trees are swaying in gentle breeze. The weather is fine; above the fortified building are flying the rosy clouds; the painted pavilion was open to provide convenience for enjoying flowers.” The Second Lunar Month·The Birthday of Flowers in volume 2 of *Qing Jia Lu* compiled by Gu Lu quoted a sentence from *Kun Xin He Zhi*: “the 12th day of the second lunar month was Huazhao Festival, that is, the birthday of flowers. Strips of red cloth were tied to all kinds of flowers.” In that part, another sentence from *Zhen Yang Zhi* was quoted, too: since the 12th day was the day when Cui Xuanwei protected flowers against aunt Feng, folks cut red cloth into pieces and fastened them to the stems of flowers and trees.” *Taican Zhou Zhi* (the annuals of Taicang state) (written during Jiajing period) recorded, “the 12th day of the second month was Huazhao Festival; boys and girls split red chiffon into pieces and attached them to the stems of flowers and trees; this day was considered as the birthday of flowers.” *Zhu Ding Yu Wen* written by Yao Fujun contained such a line: “the 12th day of the second month was Huazhao Festival which is the birthday of flower goddess. Strips of red cloth were tied to all kinds of flowers.” Civilians at Tongxiang “tied colorful silk fabrics to trees” at Huazhao Festival.⁴⁰ In the area of Huzhou, people “fastened red silk and red paper to flowers and trees”.⁴¹ In volume 1 of *Qing Bai Lei Chao* the author of which was Xu Ke, there was a part about seasons; this part recorded “Xiao Qin Empress went to the Summer Palace to see servants cut red cloth” at Huazhao Festival which was on the 12th day of the second month and watched the performance named “flower goddesses’ celebrating birthday”. Wu Cunkai, a person living in modern times, wrote a poem the title of which was Jiangxiang Jie Wu Shi·Gua Hong. The caption of this poem explained that “at Huazhao Festival, people tied pieces of red cloth to flowers and this was the legacy of the custom of protecting flowers by streamers.” In Suzhou, “the 12th day of the second month was regarded as the birthday of flowers; on this day, people fastened strips of red and green silk to the branches, as a way of celebrating the birthday of flowers”. Civilians “cut red papers into pieces to wrap branches”.⁴²

8. Holding fairs at Huazhao Festival

At Huazhao Festival, crowded fairs were often formed since people all went out on that day. The flower fair was the most popular one. Apart from making deals of goods,

39 Gu Xijia: *Customs in Westlake Area*, Hangzhou: Hangzhou Press, 2004, P53.

40 *Tongxiang Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Tongxiang County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 2 “Yu Jiang Zhi Xia·Feng Su” (the second section of records about the territory·customs). The edition printed in the 13th year of Guangxu era in Qing Dynasty.

41 *Gui'an Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Gui'an County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 12 “Yu Di Lue” (a brief record of geography). The edition printed in the 8th year of Guangxu period in Qing Dynasty.

42 Qing Ning: The Birthday of Flowers and Huazhao included in a magazine called *Za Zi*, the 6th issue in 1943.

there were multiple entertainment activities. For instance, on Huazhao Festival in Cixi, "countless activities were conducted, such as folk dancing performance the performers of which wore large masks molded according to the faces of officials working in temples, women with pockmarks, children, monks, etc. In addition, other activities like playing on a swing, playing Cuju, attending competitions about grass and flowers, selecting celestial beings who used to be officials".⁴³ *Chun'an Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Chun'an County) (compiled during Jiajing era) recorded, "Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 2nd day of the second lunar month. On that day ceremonies were hosted in east and west commercial areas that competed with each other in the degree of magnificence. Terraces were constructed there which were exquisite. They were built owing to people's love for them." *Tao An Meng Yi*, a book written by Zhang Dai made a record of Westlake incense market: this market commenced from Huazhao Festival and ended at Dragon Boat Festival. Volume 4 of *Yangzhou Hua Fang Lu* by Li Dou recorded, "Tian Fu Ju established a flower market at the entrance of a memorial arch. The flower market originated from Chanzhi Temple." In this book, a part of *Shao Yao Pu* that was written by Wang Guan was extracted, "all people in Yangzhou, whatever their social status was, wore flowers. On Kaiming Bridge, there was a flower market every morning. That may be because Chan Zhi Temple outside the city and Kaiming Bridge inside the city were both ancient flower markets. In recent years, flower courtyards appeared in some places, including Meihualing hill, Banhua village, Baocheng region, Little Maoshan hill, Leitang. The flowers grown in these courtyards were carried to the market for sale every morning. At each Huazhao Festival, an exhibition of flowers was hosted at Zhang Xiucai's home where famous flowers planted in neighboring areas gathered." *San Nong Ji* by Zhang Zongfa who lived in Qianlong period recorded, "on the 15th day, all sorts of flowers bloomed. People of all ages went out to enjoy them. This day was Huazhao Festival. People in Sichuan region sold instruments for raising silkworms in a market where music was played and many people came. This market was called silkworm market. In Jiujie, Xinzhou District in Wuhan, people in neighboring regions gathered on the river bank on Huazhao Festival to buy farm implements and trade for daily necessities; things like bamboo sculptures, paper-cuts and river lanterns were also sold there.

9. Hosting and attending banquets at Huazhao Festival

At Huazhao Festival, officials and civilians all hosting or attending banquets. The royal court of Ming Dynasty "invited civil and military officials to banquets" on that day.⁴⁴ Banquets were also prevailing among folks. Dai Fugu, a poet of Wenling in Southern Song Dynasty wrote a poem Attending a Party Hosted by My Grandnephew at Huazhao Festival: today is the date for offering sacrifices to the god of land; tomorrow is Huazhao Festival. Drinking wine on festivals is appropriate; I was invited to Donglake. Fang Hui in Yuan Dynasty composed a poem Two Relatives of Mine Miving in Wujiang Came on the evening of 25th Taking Wine with Them: Bamboo shoots that have emerged from earth are quite fresh; they are just like plates of Jade; we use willow branches to penetrate pretty

43 *Cixi Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Cixi County) (written in Tianqi Period) volume 12 "Cixi Xian Jiu Jing" (old looks of Cixi County). A version published in the 4th year of Tianqi period.

44 Tan Qian (in Qing Dynasty), *Guo Que* (a book about the history of Ming Dynasty), volume 25, "the fourth month in the year of Xin Chou, the 6th year of Zhengtong Period".

fish. I'd like to ask you to drink this bottle of wine with me; I also want to propose a toast to spring at Huazhao Festival.”⁴⁵ Chen Jiru said in Huazhao Qing: the wind is gentle; the scenery is beautiful; flowers are blossoming. Half of spring has passed. I've sent my servants to fetch fresh spring water to brew spring tea; I want to invite you to spend this joyous day with me in enjoying flowers and grass.”⁴⁶ Xiao Lixian recorded in Li Xian, “we discussed proposing a toast to the birthday of flowers and wrote something on red writing paper under the swaying streamers with drawings.” He Qiaoyuan quoted in *Min Shu* a line from *Zhangzhou Zhi* (compiled during Wangli period), “the 15th day of the second month was Huazhao Festival. On that day, senior hermits drank wine and wrote poems.” At Huazhao Festival, people also drank flower wine— good wine made from various flower petals. There was a song praising such wine, “the fragrance of flower wine is stronger than that of flowers; all families raise up their wine glass to propose toasts. The aroma of this wine is like that of the dew on flowers; its color resembles that of spring.”⁴⁷

10. Other customs

In addition to the above mentioned activities, a number of other folk activities of special significance were also conducted at Huazhao Festival.

Encouraging agriculture. In accordance with the record of the 15th day of the second lunar month in volume 1 of *Meng Liang Lu*, at Huazhao Festival, “the chief officials and county magistrates led their subordinates to suburbs and gathered folks to bestow wine and food to them, with the purpose of encouraging them to work diligently in agriculture. These officials and magistrates all took this activity seriously”. The section of “Seasons · Huazhao Festival” in volume 2 of *Shi Lin Guang Ji* written by Chen Yuanliang made this record: “according to a provision of Song Dynasty, local officials should go to suburbs to encourage agriculture on Huazhao Festival.”⁴⁸ Dong'an County's official document for encouraging agriculture recorded, “on the 15th day of the second month in the 12th year of Hongwu era, the local officials made encouragement to peasants in east suburb, announcing to them: the climate has been good, which promotes the growth of all living things. Auspicious breeze brings warmth at Huazhao Festival. Timely snow is melting in the wheat field. I need to encourage you to stick to agricultural work and you should endeavor to earn a living.”⁴⁹ *Hua Jing* also recorded; Huazhao Festival was “the date for encouraging agriculture”.⁵⁰

Playing games of grass. In Hangzhou, women loved to play games of grass in spring. Huang Zichang wrote a poem with the title of Qi Luo Xiang, “With handkerchiefs that had the drawings of the scene of spring and their skirts touching dew, women met each other in bush where warblers were singing. The fragrance of flowers attached to their sleeves;

45 Fang Hui (in Yuan Dynasty): *Tong Jiang Xu Ji*, volume 6. Included in Si Ku Quan Shu that was compiled in Wen Yuan Ge(the imperial library of Qing Dynasty).

46 Chen Jiru (in Ming Dynasty): *Bian Yong Yun Jian*, volume 4. The block-printed edition printed at the end of Ming Dynasty.

47 Huazhao Festival, an article on Taizhou Evening Post, March 6th, 2009.

48 The photocopy made Zhonghua Book Company in 1963, according to the block-printed edition printed by Chunzhuang Academy in Jian'an during Zhishun era in Yuan Dynasty (1330-1333).

49 Li Jiben (in Yuan Dynasty): *Yi Shan Wen Ji*, volume 7. A hand-copied edition made in Kangxi period.

50 Chen Haozi (in Qing Dynasty): *Hua Jing*, volume 1 “Hua·Xin Cai”.

their delicate fingers that resembled tender shoots also became fragrant. Secretly they picked grass and flowers on a path in thin mist. They cleaned the steps and exhibited lotus flowers; these girls seemed as if they were faeries from Yaotai. When daylight just came to the garden, laughers were already heard in the pavilion, these beautiful girls competing with each other the grass and flowers they picked. The winner got ear-rings made of jade or pearl. Face powder added beauty to their cheeks; their happiness could be detected from their black eyebrows. They fastened daylilies (a plant that was thought to be good for males) to their bosom belt; it could not be told whether their sweetheart had returned.⁵¹ In Cixi area, there were also competitions about grass and flowers at Huazhao Festival.⁵² Children in Jiaying "played games of grass and flied kites" on this day.⁵³

Holding lantern shows. Lantern shows were a wonderful activity held at Huazhao Festival, "lanterns made of flowers looked grotesque and gorgeous".⁵⁴ "Lanterns of flower goddess' were hung on the branches of trees with flowers at night; the light of lanterns and red flowers and green leaves form a delightful contrast."⁵⁵ "Setting lanterns of flower goddess" was a traditional activity at Huazhao Festival in Jiangcun Village, Xixi, Hangzhou.

Watching performances of opera. In Huzhou region, there was a custom of watching performances of opera at Huazhao Festival and local government was responsible for holding the performances. In accordance with the record of *Gui'an Xian Zhi* (Annals of Gui'an County) (written in the reign of Emperor Guangxu), "at Huazhao Festival, that is, the 12th day of the second lunar month... the local government office held a performance of opera that lasted a whole day; this performance was called Baihua opera."⁵⁶ Village opera and shadow play were important activities carried out at Huazhao Festival in Jiujie, Xinzhou District, Wuhan.

Offering sacrifices to ancestors at Huazhao Festival. In Tonglu region, people customarily performed "four rites" to show worship for ancestors at this festival. "Sacrifices were offered to relative ancestors in both spring and autumn; in spring, this was done at Huazhao Festival; in autumn, it was done at Chongyang Festival; when grains were newly harvested, people would inform their ancestors." "It was generally considered the 15th day of the second lunar month as Huazhao Festival; the folks' offering sacrifices to ancestors on this day was known as the springtime ritual."⁵⁷

Presenting food to each other. On Huazhao Festival, that is, on the 15th day of the second lunar month, civilians in Cixi region "made candies from apricots, syrup from sugarcane, sweet pastes from rice powder to present to one another."⁵⁸

51 Jiang Yikui (in Ming Dynasty): *Yao Shan Tang Wai Ji*, volume 71 "Yuan·Qiaoji".

52 *Cixi Xian Zhi* (the annals of Cixi County) (written in Tianqi Period) volume 12 "Cixi Xian Jiu Jing" (old looks of Cixi County). A version published in the 4th year of Tianqi period.

53 *Jiaying Xian Zhi* (the annals of Jiaying County)(in Guangxu period), volume 16 "Fengsu"(customs).

54 Laoxi: The Lantern Show at Huazhao Festival, an article included in a magazine, *Hong Mei Gui*, the 32 issue in 1925.

55 Gao Tianxing: *The Festival and Custom Culture in China*, Zhongyuan Nongmin Press, 2008, P88.

56 *Gui'an Xian Zhi*(the annals of Gui'an County) (compiled in Guangxu period), volume 12 "Yu Di Lue" (a brief record of geography). The edition printed in the 8th year of Guangxu period in Qing Dynasty.

57 *Tonglu Xian Zhi* (the annals of Tonglu County) (compiled in Qianlong era), volume 2 "Fang Yu·Feng Su" (local government affairs·customs). A hand-copied edition made in Qing Dynasty.

58 *Cixi Xian Zhi* (the annals of Cixi County) (written in Tianqi Period) volume 12 "Cixi

Praying for cleverness and skillfulness at Huazhao Festival. In Taizhou area, there was a custom girls practiced at Huazhao Festival, so as to pray for cleverness and skillfulness: they made silk dolls to represent flower goddess and prayed to the dolls in the hope of becoming as intelligent and skillful as flower goddess who was capable of embroidering shapes of all kinds of flowers.⁵⁹ At Guanzhuang village, Yuanling County, Hunan Province, girls conducted such customs as piercing the ear lobe, threading a rope through the nostrils of a cow, making paper cutting, embroidering and finding a coach to learn skills at Huazhao Festival.⁶⁰

Singing in antiphonal style in order to court. Huazhao Festival provided an excuse for young women and men to make spring outing, which also created conditions for courting. For some ethnic minorities who advocated free courting, Huazhao Festival was also of significance for love. For example, the Zhuang people named Huazhao Festival as “the festival of flower goddess”; on that day, young males and females of this ethnic group sang songs in antiphonal style to pay court, cast balls made of strips of silk and presented keepsakes to each other. They held the belief that kapok trees were the favorite living place of flower goddess; as a result, when they departed from their loved one, they tied the silk ball to a kapok tree, wishing the flower goddess would bless their relationship. At Guanzhuang village, Yuanling County, Hunan Province, it was prevailing to make a proposal at Huazhao Festival in the hope of achieving a happy marriage.

Getting smallpox vaccination. After the founding of the Republic of China, a peculiar custom appeared in Shanghai: getting smallpox vaccination at the birthday of flowers, that is, at the 12th day of the second lunar month. “Smallpox vaccination bureau was located in Yu Garden in Nanshi District of Shanghai. Innumerable mothers brought their children here on that day to get smallpox vaccination.”⁶¹ The reason for this may be that local people were accustomed to calling smallpox vaccination “flower vaccination”; thus, in their view, if their children got the vaccination on the birthday of flowers, it would be more effective. This custom was certainly quite special.

11. Modern value of customs of Huazhao Festival

In the preceding part, a variety of folk activities performed at Huazhao Festival in history were reviewed; it can be noticed that these activities not only have recreational value, but also have unique charm and cultural value with “spring”, “flowers” and “people’s fun” as its principal connotation. In spite of the change of people’s way of life and production and the influence of modern civilization and cultural activities, Huazhao Festival gradually faded away from people’s life and sight, its glamour and value remain and it still has special significance in modern times. This is an essential reason why some places have restored the celebration of this festival in recent years. In consideration of traditional customs of Huazhao Festival, the needs of contemporary people and the effects achieved by some areas that resumed the celebration

Xian Jiu Jing” (old looks of Cixi County). A version published in the 4th year of Tianqi period.

59 Huazhao Festival, an article on Taizhou Evening Post, March 6th, 2009.

60 The Joyous Huazhao Festival in a Mountain Village, an article on Hunan Daily, April 10th, 2012.

61 Qingning: The Birthday of Flowers and Huazhao, included in a Magazine named *Za Zi*, the 6th issue in 1943.

of Huazhao Festival, the author deemed that the modern value of folk customs of Huazhao Festival mainly contains the following aspects.

1. Health value

Along with the rapid development of urbanization and modernization and the acceleration of the pace of work and life in cities, people become inactive in aspects including recreation and body-building. Contemporarily, people are suffering from both physical and mental diseases known as “modern diseases”. Huazhao Festival, with spring outings and entertainment as its important activities, can tempt people to go outdoors and have a spring outing; by doing this, people can enjoy beautiful things and alleviate mental stress. In 2011, the number of visitors to Xixi on Huazhao Festival reached 1.046 million person-times, which was an increase of 34.53% compared to the same period of 2010. The celebration of the festival motivated more citizens to have spring outings.

2. Cultural value

Huazhao Festival is one of the representatives of remarkable traditional culture of Chinese nation; it appeals to all. By now, it has been regarded as a representative of intangible cultural heritage in many places, with its significant value in maintaining the diversity of regional culture. This festival not only embodied features of China's flower culture, but had multiple functions and served as a carrier for the indication of literati and officialdom's virtuousness, peasants' worship for nature, common people's demand of relaxation and the official idea of emphasizing agriculture. In modern society where faith are liable to be absent or weak and where vulgarization occasionally occurs in entertainment, Huazhao Festival can play a significant role in ameliorating modern cultural ecology by means of excellent traditional culture. In accordance with Hangzhou's experience in the successful restoration of Huazhao Festival in Xixi, the main content of the “Xixi Flower Exhibition” in the main exhibition area included enjoying, comparing and discussing flowers; activities like a fair of boutique garden plants, folk comparison of flowers, lectures on flower culture, match-making with the help of flowers were conducted. At the fair of Xixi's Jiangcun Village, various folk activities were carried out on Huazhao Festival, such as “launching flower-goddess lanterns”, holding an entertainment party inside a courtyard, performing classic Yueju Opera (Shaoxing Opera) like “five daughters offering birthday felicitation to their mother” and putting on performance of martial arts. All these activities demonstrated the unique value of this traditional festival in inheriting context, cultivating people's taste, continuing folk customs of Huazhao, conveying affection and a number of other aspects. Moreover, in respect of popularization of science, in 2011 when Hangzhou's Xixi Huazhao Festival was celebrated, more than 300 kinds of flowers which were classified into 12 topics were planted on the 1.6-mile-long green bank of Xixi Wetland. An information tag was attached to each kind of flower, introducing its scientific name, trivial name, variety, family, place of origin, etc. Such tags formed a “flower museum” which enabled people to get to know related information while enjoying flowers. In addition, Xixi Huazhao Festival cooperated with primary and middle schools in Hangzhou to carry out second classroom education; teaching was made through lively activities. 8000 plus students visited this place for free and acquired abundant knowledge about flowers.

3. Ecological value

As a festival celebrated in early spring, Huazhao Festival reveals an atmosphere of “flowers” and “spring”. It has outstanding value in the greenization and beatification of environment and the improvement of regional ecology. Amidst the Hangzhou Huazhao Festival, the main exhibition area displayed six categories of historically famous flowers, in-

cluding Chinese flowering crabapples, wild Chinese viburnums, azaleas, etc and six internationally well-known flowers, including hawthorn blossoms and roses. More than 300 varieties of flowers and 50 plus woody plants were grown in the area, which greatly boosted the ecological environment of the wetland and showed the wonderful scenery of Xixi where flowers were seen everywhere. In the meantime, outside the exhibition area, communities, roads and even houses were all decorated with flowers. With the purpose of creating the festival atmosphere and “demonstrating flowers everywhere in Hangzhou”, Westlake District made roads around wetland colorful. Flowers were planted at an area of 4800 square meters in the three greenbelts in the middle of Tianmushan Road (between Muoganshan Road and Liuxia Street). “Spring Flowers in Full Blossom”, the Flower landscape on the crossroad of Tianmushan Road and Moganshan Road, was arranged; in addition, several opuscula about flowers with the topic of “information about flowers”, “the beautiful urban area welcome you”, etc. were put performed. All arterial streets in Hangzhou city and all its entrances and exits were decorated with opuscula concerning flowers; flowers appeared everywhere in Hangzhou. Meanwhile, the entrances and exits of 10 communities within the boundary of activity area of Huazhao Festival were selected as “beautification sites”, according to the route of float parade. These communities which are the home of its residents were beautified. “Flower streets” and “flower communities” led to a pleasant change of atmosphere, upgraded living environment, aroused citizens’ enthusiasm of greenizing and beautifying their home and profoundly elevated the flower markets of the city.

4. Industry value

The 1st Xixi Huazhao Festival hosted by Hangzhou, China, which lasted 42 days gained operating revenue of 26.36million yuan. The main exhibition area, “green bank of Xixi”, alone received about 200,000 tourists; the number nearly rose 20 times compared to the same period of the previous year. The benefits of tourism industry were evident. Within the framework of modern industry system, apart from tourism industry, Huazhao Festival is also helpful for building flower markets and flower industry, propelling the development of cultural industry, especially cultural creative industry, and traditional handicraft industry and food industry characterized by Huazhao Festival.

Expediting the birth of cultural creative industry of Huazhao Festival. Xixi, Hangzhou, successfully constructed the “cultural creative line of green bank” by means of Huazhao Festival. Green bank provided people with visual impact generated by millions of fresh flowers falling into 300 varieties which were called the 11th piece of scenery of Xixi; besides, visitors could experience exciting activities carried out on the green bank; the emergence of action art, creative photography, wedding celebration of Huazhao Festival, clothes for Huazhao Festival and so on were also promoted. Simultaneously, artistic creation concerning Huazhao Festival flourished. In the renewal of Xicheng Square, Westlake District boldly incorporated the historical connotation of Huazhao Festival celebrated in Song Dynasty and built in the center of the square a sculpture of “flower goddess” which was about 10 meters high, re-presented the prosperous scene of Huazhao Festival in history. What’s more, Huazhao Festival boosted the development of Xixi Creative Industry Park. At present, 70% of the films and TV series made in Hangzhou and more than 50% of such things made in Zhejiang province were produced in Xixi Creative Industry Park. The emergence of cultural creative industry concerning Huazhao Festival injected vitality into Xixi Creative Industry Park, strengthened brand effects and was conducive to attracting more cultural celebrities to come and open their own studio.

Boosting traditional handicraft industry. During Hangzhou’s Xixi Huazhao Festival

tival, a batch of crafts and works of fine art with regional characteristics and exquisite craftsmanship, were shown in front of people, together with a wide range of folk skills and intangible cultural heritage such as dough figurines, blown sugar sculptures, facial masks, crafts woven with palm fiber, painting on eggshell, so on and so forth. All these things were very popular. Huazhao Festival can protect and promote effectively these traditional skills that are on the verge of disappearing.

Facilitating the development of food and drinks. The “banquet of a variety of flowers” hosted during the 1st Xixi Huazhao Festival supplied citizens and tourists with delicious and rare food made from flowers, on the basis of modern concept of health. In order to coordinate with the celebration of Huazhao Festival, Yanshui Yu Zhuang (a restaurant characterized by dishes made of fish) at Xixi Wetland picked 40 plus categories of edible fresh flowers and meticulously designed 8 cold dishes, 12 hot dishes and 2 desserts, after making research for two months, by combining cooking methods like boiling, frying, stewing, mixing and steaming and taking concept of health into consideration. Thereinto, a dish named “blossom of spring and moon of autumn” containing chrysanthemum morifolium, orange and tender crab meat had the function of alleviating fever, removing liver-fire and improving eyesight. Another dish with the name of “lotus rising from under water” was made by stir-frying lily together with slices of the meat of sea whelks, which had the functions of moistening lungs, clearing heat and soothing the nerves. Furthermore, a dish called “crystal shrimps cooked with roses” could clear heat and maintain beauty. “Peony and fish” was beneficial for supplementing qi and blood and nourishing spleen and stomach. A dish made of “orchids, plum blossoms, Chinese yams and osmanthus flowers” could help to reinforce kidneys, produce saliva and slake thirst. “Jelly made of cowheels and honeysuckles” had the potency of preventing sunstroke, clearing heat and quenching thirst. Numerous pleasant-looking and delicious dishes made of flowers enabled citizens and tourists to learn about traditional food culture and health concepts concerning food. Currently, a lot of catering enterprises in Hangzhou are making use of the brand effect of Huazhao Festival and developing food products relevant to Huazhao Festival, which can be stored and transported across long distances, for instance, Huazhao wine, so as to attain long-term economic benefits. It can be anticipated that the food industry related to Huazhao Festival has bright prospect.

Elevating the flower and seedling industry. Huazhao Festival provided an excellent platform for the development of flowers and seedlings. Judging from the situation in Hangzhou, Huazhao Festival stimulated citizens and tourists’ love for growing flowers, the flower market on green bank displayed and sold more than 300 categories of pot plants and flowers which attracted queues of buyers; the daily average sales volume was more than 600 pots. Huazhao Festival also promoted the sales of flowers in surrounding areas. Flowers and pot plants sold by the two major flower and bird markets in the west part of Hangzhou during the festival in 2011 increased by 15% or so, compared to that in the same period of the previous year.

12. Conclusion

Huazhao Festival embodies strong cultural atmosphere. Combining Chinese people’s worship and sentiment for flowers, customs about flowers and recreational concepts, it is a significant manifestation of the diversity of our nation’s culture. Through literature review,

it can be found out that originally the way of celebrating Huazhao Festival was to have spring outings and enjoy flowers; later, varied folk activities were carried out, such as catching butterflies, picking wild vegetables, offering sacrifices to god, forecasting harvest, “shang hong” (fastening pieces of red cloth to flowers and trees), holding competitions about grass, encouraging agriculture, hosting and attending banquets, courting, etc. This festival manifested some features of our nation’s culture, containing elegance, harmoniousness, life-friendliness. The characteristics and relevant activities of Huazhao Festival comply with modern people’s aesthetic appreciation and pursuits and also meet the requirements of environmental protection and industry improvement; besides, it has special value in aspects like health, culture, ecology and industry. Huazhao Festival used to be an importance festival in a number of places, which was identified widely; thus, its nation-wide restoration and popularization was feasible and valuable. Its restoration in Hangzhou, Guangzhou and some other places was powerful evidence. What is foreseeable is that the restoration of this delicate, lovely, romantic, universal and traditional festival will certainly demonstrate its unique glamour and value, acquire more widely identification and have more development, in its integration with the cultural concepts and demands of modern people. The society should create conditions to guide the healthy development and prosperity of Huazhao culture in a new era; moreover, it ought to give support and guidance to the development of Huazhao industry, propel the development of multiple industries and make this traditional festival better contribute to the economic and social development, by taking measures including investment, tax adjustment, financing convenience and so on.

References

- [1] *Renhe Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Renhe County)(compiled in the reign of Emperor Kangxi) Volume 5 “customs”: “People in Tang Dynasty celebrated Huazhao Festival on the 15th day of the second lunar month.” This book was the block-printed edition printed in the 26th year of Kangxi Period (1687). A book that was the block-printed edition printed in the Hall of Wu Ying Dian in the 49th year of Kangxi Period (1710), *Yuan Jian Lei Han · Sui Shi Bu Qi · Huazhao* quoted from *Ti Yao Lu*: “Huazhao Festival was celebrated on the 15th day of the second lunar month in Tang Dynasty.”
- [2] Luo Qiu (Tang Dynasty): *Hua Jiu Ci*, included in volume I set 4 of *Xiang Yan Cong Shu*, a book compiled by Chong Tianzi. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 1992, p. 963.
- [3] Huazhao Festival celebrated in the recent ten years was very popular but lacked folk customs, an article on *Chutian Metropolis Daily* issued on March 8th, 2012.
- [4] People in Love worshiped for a happy marriage in rain on Huazhao Festival, an article on *Southern Metropolis Daily* issued on March 19th 2011.
- [5] Chen Bangzhan (Ming Dynasty), *He Hua Shan Fang Shi Gao* (a collection of poems) volume 22. The block-printed edition printed by Niu Weichi in the 46th year of Wanli era in Ming Dynasty.
- [6] *Kuaiji Xian Zhi* (the annuals of Kuaiji County) (written in Kangxi period) volume 7 “records of customs”. The stereotype edition proofread by the History Recording committee of Shaoxing County, which was printed in the 25th year of The Republic of China.
- [7] Fang Hui (in Yuan Dynasty): *Tong Jiang Xu Ji*, volume 6. Included in *Si Ku Quan Shu* that was compiled in *Wen Yuan Ge* (the imperial library of Qing Dynasty).

Summary

Huazhao Festival is a traditional one that is celebrated in early spring and appeals to both highbrows and lowbrows. Once, it was as significant as Lantern Festival and Mid-autumn Festival. Ever since Tang Dynasty, it has undergone stages of emerging, thriving, declining and restoring. Originally, people only had a spring outing enjoying beautiful flowers at this festival; later, various other folk activities were also carried out on this day, including catching butterflies, picking wild vegetables, offering sacrifices to gods, predicting bumper and poor harvest, fastening strips of red cloth to stems of flowers and trees (shang hong), having competitions on grass, encouraging agriculture, holding and attending banquets, writing articles, paying court and so on. These activities demonstrated such characteristics of the national culture of China as elegance, harmony and life-friendliness. Obviously different from other traditional festivals like Spring Festival, Mid-autumn Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, etc, Huazhao Festival has unique style and value. Despite its fading away from people's life due to changes in modern society, its cultural glamour and comprehensive value still exist. Along with economic and social development and the increase of people's spiritual and cultural demands, Huazhao Festival has regained people's attention. It has been restored and hosted in some regions and identified as an intangible cultural heritage. By means of literature review, the folk customs of Huazhao Festival was re-presented to some extent in this paper. Its modern values in areas including health, culture, ecology and industry were analyzed. This paper is of certain significance, in respect of conserving and inheriting this national festival, promoting its restoration in more regions in a way more approximate to historical tradition and giving play to its unique role to benefit modern society.